Living with domestic abuse and substance use

written by Sarah Galvani, University of Bedfordshire



Introduction

This leaflet is intended to provide you with information about domestic abuse and substance use¹. Violent and abusive behaviour often happens when a person has been drinking or taking drugs and people often don't know how much the alcohol or drug is to blame for this behaviour. Partners, parents, family members and friends can be victims of a person's abusive behaviour or may see it happening to others. This leaflet provides some facts about the relationship between domestic abuse and substance use. It looks at its impact on victims, family and friends, as well as what you can do to help others, and yourself, stay safe.

What is Domestic Abuse?

- Domestic abuse is not just about hitting or physical violence. Domestic Abuse includes a range
 of violent and abusive behaviours. Usually victims of domestic abuse are women (and
 children) and perpetrators are men although this is not always the case.
- Victims say that the most damaging forms of abuse can be mental and emotional abuse because they are living in fear about what might happen next, are afraid to say or do certain things in case it makes things worse, and are made to feel unattractive and stupid.
- The leading domestic violence agency in the UK defines domestic abuse as "physical, sexual, psychological or financial violence that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship and that forms a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. This can include forced marriage and so-called 'honour crimes'. Domestic violence may include a range of abusive behaviours, not all of which are inherently 'violent'." (Women's Aid 2007).

What are the facts?

The relationship between domestic abuse and substance use is not a simple one. However, there are some common misunderstandings about how the two are linked. The following questions are frequently asked by people who want to know more:

Do alcohol and drugs cause domestic violence and abuse?

No. When the people who are being violent and abusive are our partners, children, other family members and friends, it is natural to want to find a reason for it but drugs and alcohol are not to blame. Research shows that people who are violent and abusive under the influence of alcohol or drugs are usually violent and abusive without it (see Galvani 2006). Drugs that have a stimulating effect, like crack cocaine and steroids, are commonly thought to increase aggressive behaviour but research shows this is not always the case (Friedman et al. 2001, Haasen and Krausz 2001, Parker and Auerhahn 1998).

We know that alcohol and drug use can affect our mood and body in a number of ways but this is not the same as turning a non- abusive person into a violent and abusive one. What is clear is that there is a link between the two but this is different from the alcohol or drugs being to *blame* for the person's violent behaviour. Sometimes people who are violent or abusive will use their substance use as an excuse for their behaviour and for doing things they would not normally do because they feel they will get away with it. Research has also shown that when people *expect* alcohol to make them behave more aggressively it does, even when they have not had any (Dougherty et al. 1999, Parrott and Zeichner 2002)!

¹ 'Substance use' includes alcohol as well as illicit drug use.

Do alcohol or drugs make the domestic violence or abuse worse?

Yes and no! Where domestic abuse already exists, research shows that alcohol or drug use can increase in the frequency of physical violence and abuse and injuries may be worse when the perpetrator is under the influence of a substance (Brecklin 2002, Brookoff et al. 1997, Fals-Stewart 2003, Graham et al. 2004, Leonard and Quigley's 1999, Leonard and Senchak 1996). However, domestic abuse is not just physical violence. Alcohol or drugs will not affect other forms of abusive behaviour, for example, controlling behaviour. This can include the abusive person controlling the victim's access to their family or friends or their access to services; they may tell them what to wear or control how long they can go out for.

• Does someone's own alcohol or drug use make them more likely to be a victim of domestic abuse?

Yes, it can do. This <u>does not mean</u> they are to blame! The person who is being violent and abusive is <u>always</u> responsible for their own actions. However, sometimes a victim can become vulnerable when they've been drinking or using drugs and therefore an easier target. They may be less able to think quickly or get out of a difficult situation. However it is important to understand that some women drink or use drugs to cope with the physical and psychological pain of domestic abuse (Clark and Foy 2000; Corbin et al. 2001; Galvani 2006; Miller 2001; Miller et al. 2000). There are also strong links between experiences of abuse in childhood and adult substance use (Clark and Foy 2000, Downs et al. 2004, Galaif et al. 2001, Hartley et al. 2004, Kantor and Asdigan 1997, Miller et al. 1993, Pedersen and Skrondal 1996, Wall et al. 2000).

Will drug or alcohol treatment stop the violence?

No. What research shows is that for some people who are violent and abusive, reducing or stopping their substance use can *reduce* the domestic abuse for a period of time (O'Farrell and Murphy 1995, O'Farrell et al. 1999, 2003, 2004). However, reducing abusive behaviour is not the same as stopping it all together and research suggests that this does not happen. It also shows that for people who are not successful in their attempts to change their substance use or who return to problematic levels of substance use the domestic abuse continues or escalates.

NB. It is also important to remember that when people cut down or change their substance use, it can be an extremely uncomfortable process, both mentally and physically. People may experience mood changes, increased anxieties, and emotional ups and downs which may worsen their abusive behaviour rather than improve it. It is important not to assume that reducing or stopping the substance use will suddenly make the person behave better.

What is the impact of domestic abuse?

The following section summarises some of the common effects of domestic abuse on adult and child victims. This might help you and your family member or friend understand more about what you, or they, are experiencing.

Adult victims

- Mental ill health eg. depression, post traumatic stress disorder
- Poor psychological health eg. feeling ashamed, unattractive and not worth much, feeling nervous/anxious, living in fear, not knowing who to trust or what to do for the best
- Physical ill health eg. bruises, miscarriage, broken bones, stomach problems
- Drinking alcohol or using drugs as a way of coping with the hurt
- Financial problems or not being allowed to have their own money
- Being cut off from family and friends because the abuser doesn't like them or has fallen out with them
- Becoming very sensitive to the perpetrator's mood and behaviour as a way of trying to guess if abusive or violent behaviour will follow
- Developing ways of avoiding arguments and abuse, eg. not giving your own opinion, trying to
 do things he likes, making sure dinner is ready when he wants it or toys are put away before
 he gets in
- Hitting back to try to defend themselves or protect the children
- Not being the parent they can be and want to be because of dealing with the physical, mental and emotional impact of the abuse

Children

- Keeping secrets –they know it is wrong but are worried about what will happen if they speak out
- Emotional problems how will children make sense of living with love and attention one minute and violence and abuse the next?
- Feeling fearful and responsible "it's my fault for leaving my toys out"
- Confusion and upset eg. which parent are they supposed to help? If dad says he loves mum and is nasty to her will he be the same with me?
- Psychological problems, eg. low self esteem and self confidence and/or mental health problems, eg. depression
- Changes or problems in behaviour, eg. becoming withdrawn or acting aggressively/ copying the abusive behaviour
- Suffering physical abuse or overly harsh punishment from their parent/s
- Disrupted routines, eg. school attendance, trips or visits
- Social isolation, ie. don't want to/not allowed to bring friends home so they won't go to the friend's house or party because they can't invite them back
- Difficulties, and often abuse, in their relationships as adolescents and adults

People often think the children don't know about the violence or abuse but children usually do know and are scared. The impact on children and young people of domestic abuse can be very damaging to them.

NB. Child care law now includes **witnessing or hearing the ill treatment of someone else** as causing potential harm to children. This shows how seriously domestic abuse can harm children even if they are not the direct victims of the violence or abuse. The emotional and psychological impact on them can cause many problems in childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The impact on family and friends

The impact of domestic abuse on families and friends will vary from person to person depending on their age, their relationship with the abusive person, whether they live in the same household, what other support they have, and what level of independence and choice they have. For example, a friend who lives in their own home with a supportive partner will be affected very differently from an older, dependent relative who is living in the household where the violence and abuse is taking place. Some of the common responses of family and friends include:

- Not knowing what to do and how to help
- Not understanding why the relationship continues
- Not wanting to 'interfere'
- Stopping visits to the relative/friend and/or inviting them round
- Worrying about the impact on any children or siblings

If the relative or friend is the person being abusive (NB. usually a man but not always):

- Denying that he is being abusive or violent
- Minimising the violence and abuse by saying it will 'blow over' or it is just a 'bad patch' and that 'all relationships go through this'
- Supporting the abuse by defending his behaviour or saying it is his 'right' or that it is the 'role'
 of the husband/man to 'discipline' his wife/woman
- Taking part in the abuse out of fear, or a mistaken sense of loyalty.

If the relative or friend is the victim (NB. usually a woman and children but not always):

- Fearing for her/their safety
- Being afraid to talk to her/them about it
- Feeling frustrated that she does not leave
- Blaming her for not leaving/doing something rather than blaming the perpetrator

What can we do to help?

As a partner, parent, family member or friend of a person with substance problems it is difficult to know how to help. It can be even more difficult where the person is suffering, or perpetrating, domestic abuse too. Faced with two problems it is difficult to know where to start to help – the substance use or the domestic abuse or both? People can get help for both at the same time, however, people's safety must always be the priority. It is going to be far more difficult to address drug or alcohol problems if the person is feeling scared and unsafe.

Offering help and support

- Find out more about domestic abuse and the support and services available
 - o go 'on line' for more information (see below for useful websites)
 - o call a domestic violence helpline and ask for advice 0800 2000 247
- Think about how domestic abuse might affect your friend's or family member's alcohol or drug use is it numbing their hurt and pain? are they using it as an excuse to be abusive?

For victims

Offer emotional support

- o ask her what you can do to help
- listen, believe and reassure your friend and family member they are not to blame for the abuse. People who are abusive will often blame the victim so you need to be careful not to do that.
- remind her of her strengths and the things that she's good at because this can help her stay strong
- o encourage her to talk to someone about it by telephone or in person
- offer to be around more when the abusive partner is there (providing it is safe for you to do so)
- don't give up on her. It is hard to watch someone you care for being hurt but giving in to your frustration and giving up trying to help will leave her feeling alone and play into the hands of the abuser
- o if your friend/family member is getting help for their drug or alcohol problem, would they like you to go along with them? Some agencies encourage family and friends to go along with them for support.

Offer practical support

- o find out about agencies who can help if she wants you to
- arrange to see her or call her regularly she will need your support and someone to talk
 to. If you can go out together then even better time away from the perpetrator will
 help and allow you to talk more openly
- o agree a code word or phrase between you that tells you she needs help immediately, eg. you may want agree a code for 'I'm scared, I need help now'. It needs to be something she can use when the perpetrator is present without raising his suspicions.
- talk with her about what her choices are and do not judge her if she decides to do nothing. Leaving an abusive relationship is extremely difficult both emotionally and practically. It is also a time when violence and abuse can get worse so planning to leave and finding a safe place to stay is important.
- offer to look after an 'escape bag' for her that contains some essentials in case she decides to leave in a hurry. This could include a spare set of car keys, a change of clothes, money, a toy for the children, important documents, eg. identity documents (birth certificates/passports) or medical cards or immigration papers/work permits

Supporting or helping someone who is suffering domestic abuse can take a lot of energy and determination. Make sure you have someone else around who is willing to support you. Take care of yourself and don't feel guilty about going out and having fun. In order to offer support you need to recharge your batteries too.

For perpetrators

How to help the person being abusive or violent will depend on your relationship with person and how safe you feel talking to them. If the person is a close friend or family member and you feel you can talk to them without putting yourself at risk or making things worse for the victim(s) then you could:

- remind them that you care for them but tell them that what they are doing is wrong and must stop
- remind them they have choices about how they behave and have to take 100% responsibility for their actions
- don't allow them to use their alcohol or drug use as an excuse for their violent or abusive behaviour
- ask them what impact they think their abusive behaviour is having on their relationship

 after all, it's not going to improve their relationship with their partner or children is
 it!
- tell them that although you care for them you are prepared to call the police to stop people being hurt or abused
- give them the Respect phone line number for perpetrators of domestic abuse 0845
 122 8609 and advise them to call

NB. This would only work if the perpetrator has told you about their behaviour. If the victim has told you it is not a good idea to discuss it with the perpetrator as it could lead to worse abuse and violence for the victim later. The perpetrator may see it as her 'telling tales' or 'telling other people our business' and 'punish' her for that with more abuse and/or violence. This may stop her from talking to you in the future.

Staying safe

The most important point in helping someone who is perpetrating or suffering domestic abuse is to ensure that you and the victims of the abuse are safe. **Don't hesitate to call the police – 999 – if you fear for the safety of your family member, friend, their children or yourself.** Domestic abuse is <u>not</u> a private matter; it is wrong, it is a crime, and abusive people will not stop unless there are serious consequences to their behaviour.

Help and Advice

Helplines

Agency	Helpline number
Freephone 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge)	0808 2000 247
Childline	0800 1111
Community Legal Service Direct is a free government-funded confidential advice service	0845 345 4 345
Men's Advice Line The Men's Advice Line provides a range of services aimed at men experiencing domestic abuse from their partner	0808 801 0327
NSPCC	0808 800 5000
Respect The Respect phone line is an information and advice line for people who are abusive towards their partners	0845 122 8609
Rights of Women	0207 251 6577

Useful websites

Organisation	Website address
Women's Aid	www.womensaid.co.uk
Refuge	www.refuge.org.uk/homepage.asp?l1=1
Broken Rainbow	www.lgbt-dv.org/
Stella Project – tel: 020 7785 3862	http://www.gldvp.org.uk/C2B/document tree/ViewACategory.asp?CategoryID=73
Respect	www.respect.uk.net/
The Home Office Domestic Violence website	http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/dv/dv 01.htm
NSPCC - Offers advice and information on domestic abuse and taking care of children.	www.nspcc.org.uk.
Information for Black and minority ethnic women link and specialist services (via Women's Aid)	http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-survivors-handbook.asp?section=000100010008000 100350001&search=black+and+minority+ethnic
Tackling domestic violence: providing support for children who have witnessed domestic violence. Written by Audrey Mullender (2004)	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs0 4/dpr33.pdf
Domestic abuse information for children	www.thehideout.org.uk
NSPCC – information for people under age 18	http://www.nspcc.org.uk/under18/Under 18HubPage wda33341.html
Domestic violence leaflet for family and friends of people experiencing domestic violence	http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strateg ies/dom_violence/docs/friends-and- family.pdf

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Heather Cole and Lorna Templeton for their helpful comments.

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